

Colorado Rainbows

I was introduced to fly fishing about a year ago by colleagues in Denver, CO, and this being my first visit there since then, I was sure to encourage those who started me on fishing to organise a weekend on one of their rivers (I was there on business and so the weekdays were already full...). As it happens, a day of fishing was arranged on the Big Thompson River at a ranch called Sylvan Dale, which provides private access to the river over about 2 or 3 miles and has a couple of large lakes which can be fished also.

Our group of 6 were joined by Dan, a local guide from The Hatch Fly Shop. We set out from Denver at about 6:30am for a drive of about an hour and a half north west into the Rocky Mountains. We fished the larger of the lakes first after a coffee and were fishing by 9am. There were plenty of large looking trout cruising close to the edges of the lake in plain sight, but getting one interested in my woolly buggie on the end of my line was another story. After three hours, I got not even a second look, but in total our group landed three rainbows, about 14, 18 and 23 inches.

A couple of us moved to the river (about a 15 minute walk away), just before lunch I had a strike on a nymph on my second cast. After such a slow morning this apparently surprised me more than it did the fish, and it was off the hook barely before I knew it was on. This did however indicate more success was to be had after lunch.



September is notoriously hot in Denver, and this day was no exception. By lunch time, the temperature must have been well above 30 degrees C, with bright sunshine and no wind. The water is snowmelt from way up in the Rockies, so is quite cool (I don't know what temperature, but it was cold) regardless of the temperature, and the relatively steep terrain makes for a great trout stream. With big rocks breaking up the flow, some deep pools and fast flowing runs weaving for great lengths in some places. Evidently this is an environment that supports plenty of trout!

I used a large grasshopper pattern with a small prince nymph dropper (and, unusually for me, kept it attached all afternoon!) My first cast after lunch into a pool behind a large boulder in the middle of the stream was taken by a rainbow trout of about 13 inches. About 30 or 40 metres upstream came another rainbow. This pattern continued for a couple of hours, with rainbows and browns of about 11-13 inches being found reasonably easily as I moved upstream about a mile, and with the aid of using my big grasshopper like a strike indicator, caught without too much fuss.



The highlight came after landing a small rainbow. Dan, our guide, came to ask if I wanted a photo. "Sure" I said, removing the hook from the fish and tossing it downstream (the fly, not the fish). I was preparing to ask the fish to smile, when an unexpected tug on my discarded line signalled another fish, which, with Dan's help, I retrieved and in doing so found another small trout, leaving me with a rainbow, a brown and a camera all ready at the same time!. This was a real treat. I moved back downstream and managed to land another one following that, but they had calmed down in the afternoon and so by 5pm we packed up for the day and headed back to Denver. I landed 6 for the day.

I would recommend anyone heading through Colorado not to miss an opportunity to have a fish, it is really great. I carried most of my own gear with me as I had some room in my luggage. I was not overly pleased that Qantas made me check-in my rod as it's classed as a weapon, although I know a few trout in plenty of rivers would argue that it is harmless! When all my luggage failed to appear in Los Angeles, I was even more displeased. Luckily it was located and retrieved within a few hours. I declared all my fishing gear on my return home to Australia, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service did a terrific job cleaning my wading shoes!

Peter Johnson